

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST FOR A NEW PROGRAM AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY:
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN GERONTOLOGY**

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by Iowa State University to establish a new Master of Science Program in Gerontology in the College of Human Sciences.

Executive Summary: The proposed program will offer new opportunities for students in the field of gerontology. This proposal was reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. No concerns were raised when it was presented to the Iowa Coordinating Council for Post-High School Education. The proposed program addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities to “provide educational excellence and impact as well as economic development and vitality” and Goal #8 – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive.”

Background:

- ❖ Description of program. The primary objective of the proposed program is to provide students a comprehensive education in gerontology. The program was designed using the guidelines for master’s programs in gerontology established by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). According to those guidelines, students take courses covering psychosocial issues, health aspects, research methods, and additional electives. A thesis or project for a non-thesis option (e.g., publishable paper or special project) is required for master’s students.
- ❖ Current program offering in Gerontology. Currently, a master’s program exists under the name “Master of Family and Consumer Sciences (MFCS)” with a specialization in gerontology. This online program is one of five degree tracks in Family and Consumer Science.¹
- ❖ Need for stand-alone program. While the gerontology track has served a purpose, it has a number of critical weaknesses as an on-campus degree program:
 - ⇒ The absence of “Gerontology” in the graduate degree name has limited student recruitment.
 - ⇒ Students have encountered difficulties with job placement due to the absence of “Gerontology” on their transcript. Potential employers may view them as less qualified in the employment screening process.
 - ⇒ A thesis option is not available to the MFCS students which limits their research experiences.
 - ⇒ Students desiring to pursue an on-campus graduate degree in gerontology have had to enroll in the online Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) master’s program because there is no on-campus graduate program in gerontology at ISU.

¹ <http://www.hs.iastate.edu/odeet/students/programs/homepage2.php>.

⇒ The absence of an on-campus graduate program in gerontology has affected accountability. Documenting the success of the Interdepartmental Gerontology program has been challenging. For example, it is difficult to determine the number of graduate students who have a strong gerontology focus because their degree major is in a different department, including Human Development and Family Studies, Kinesiology, and Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies.

- ◇ Relationship to institutional strategic plan. The mission of the Interdepartmental Gerontology Program is to provide instruction, promote interdisciplinary research, and provide services that advance an understanding of gerontology. The program currently offers an undergraduate minor, a graduate minor, and participates in a related online graduate degree and certificate program. It seeks to attract and educate students who will become leaders in both academic and applied settings to improve the quality of life for older individuals and their families in Iowa, the nation, and the world. The proposed program will initiate and facilitate interdisciplinary research in aging. A strong connection to Extension Outreach will facilitate dissemination of aging-related knowledge.

ISU's strategic plan priorities include strengthening undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, increasing the number of programs that are among the best, translating discoveries into viable technologies, elevating the state's appeal as a place to live, learn, work, and play, and ensuring that the university is a great place to learn and work.² To address these priorities, the department has strengthened graduate education significantly by adding courses on aging. The work on exceptional longevity is recognized around the country and the world. Discoveries have been translated into technologies by partnering with faculty in the Department of Computer Science to procure federal funding to continue research efforts to develop smart-home technologies that will assist older adults to stay longer in their homes in a healthy environment. Students are employed in Iowa, other states, and in several countries as service providers, community leaders, educators, and researchers. The Gerontology Program has sponsored conferences and monthly colloquia that add to the university as a great place to learn.

The College of Human Sciences strategic plan reflects that of the University.³ The College vision is to expand human potential across the life span by improving science and technology that applies throughout people's daily living and learning. The College's mission is to create, share, and apply knowledge to improve people's lives through the science and technology of living and learning. Thereby, the College prepares transformative leaders for the nation and the world. A graduate degree program in gerontology will support the College's vision and mission because it will focus on changes across the latter half of the life span and because it will have the capacity to prepare transformative leaders.

- ◇ Relationship to existing programs at ISU. The proposed program will enhance the availability of specialized training in gerontology. Students will continue to have the current options available – the gerontology track in the Master of Consumer and Family Science Program and the Great Plains IDEA program.

² <http://www.provost.iastate.edu/what-we-do-sp>.

³ <http://www.hs.iastate.edu/about/planning/strategic/>.

- ◆ Need for proposed program. As identified in the last University review of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program, there is a need to have an on-campus graduate program explicitly in gerontology. There is a strong need in Iowa and across the U.S. to train more direct care and professional staff to work with older adults. The demand for a workforce which can incorporate life-span development and aging principles in their work is growing. Gerontology training can provide new opportunities for students in their careers.
- ◆ Duplication. The current Great Plains IDEA master's program and the proposed program in gerontology will be the only graduate level programs at the Regent universities. The University of Northern Iowa offers a bachelor's program in gerontology; students who graduate from that program will have an opportunity for graduate level work through the proposed program. The University of Iowa provides a focus on aging through their undergraduate Interdepartmental Studies Program. Students in that program also represent a pool of potential graduate applicants. At the graduate level, the University of Iowa offers an Interdisciplinary Graduate Fellowship in Aging through the Center on Aging and a graduate minor or certificate (Aging Studies Program in the School of Social Work). However, these programs are not majors and their focus is more clinically oriented. There is no other graduate level program in gerontology in the state with a direct care focus.

Begun in 2010, the Iowa Consortium of Aging Programs⁴ includes representatives from the University of Northern Iowa, University of Iowa, and Des Moines Area Community College who expressed strong support for the proposed program.

- ◆ Student demand. The increasing number of older adults is creating a need to support successful aging from a multidisciplinary perspective. "Between January 1 and December 31, 2011, more than 7,000 people will turn 65 years old every single day. Financial security and improving their health are top concerns; these issues affect their outlook now, how they feel about the future, and what plans they are making. Like their parents, they want to age in place, and have found that aging often presents chronic health conditions and financial responsibilities that influence how they will live the last third of life."⁵

ISU students need to understand aging and prepare for careers working with older adults and their families. In her 2007 book, "101 Careers in Gerontology," C. Joanne Grabinski outlined the demand and need to train gerontologists:

- ⇒ "Wanted: gerontology workers, gerontological specialists, and gerontologists for careers now and into the future. Work with, for, and on behalf of the growing population of elders (including centenarians) in a wide variety of settings. Required: training/education in appropriate field and at appropriate level for specific position; specialization in aging studies/gerontology is highly desirable. Ability to rethink one's concept of old and deconstruct myths about old people and the processes of aging is mandatory."

An on-campus graduate program in gerontology will address student demand. The current gerontology track faculty routinely field requests from students interested in pursuing a master's or doctoral degree in gerontology.

⁴ <http://www.gerontology.iastate.edu/community-extension/icap/>.

⁵ American Association of Retired Persons, 2011.

The proposed program will complement the existing Great Plains IDEA master's program. The online master's students commented that they cannot obtain assistantships and miss out on valuable research opportunities. An on-campus master's program will offer an alternative to those students whose only option now is an online program.

- ◆ Unique features. In 2006, there were 37.3 million older adults (65 years and older) in the United States. They represented 12.4% of the U.S. population. The number of older adults is expected to increase dramatically in the next 40 years to 20% of the U.S. population.⁶ Iowa has the 5th highest percentage of older persons (65+) and the 3rd highest percentage of oldest-old individuals (85+) in the U.S. Aging in a rural context also presents unique challenges for older persons, their families, and providers. As a land-grant university, ISU needs a Gerontology Program that addresses implications of these demographic changes of aging, and that prepares citizens in Iowa, the United States, and the world for an aging society.

With the increasing number of old and very old adults in Iowa by the year 2050, ISU needs to support the proposed program. Caring for this increasing number of older adults presents challenges of both cost and “manpower;” it will take technology and innovation and new multidisciplinary solutions. ISU is particularly well-positioned to offer such collaborations across departments reflecting basic, applied, behavioral, and technological science expertise.

An effective Gerontology Program will train students who will serve older Iowans, inform students and the public about healthy aging, and use state-of-the-art knowledge and technology to prepare for an aging society. This includes attracting outstanding faculty and students who will be at the cutting edge of research and training. ISU has the opportunity to be recognized nationally and internationally for its impact in addressing major aging issues. ISU will need to play a leading role in one of the most pressing social issues facing the world today – the graying of society.

- ◆ Resources. The proposed program will not require additional faculty lines, facilities, or equipment. Fifty faculty members are already involved in the Gerontology Program.⁷ An existing list of faculty members approved to serve on graduate minor students' program of study committees is already in place.⁸ These faculty, as well as other faculty, can serve as committee members for the proposed program. An approved Gerontology-related faculty member will be required to serve as major professor or co-major professor for students in the proposed program.

Gerontology and Gerontology-related courses already exist on campus. In addition, Great Plains IDEA courses can augment the on-campus courses. Only three new courses are needed to fill content needs in the curriculum and to form cohorts of Gerontology students. Therefore, the additional work load of faculty will be minimal.

All Great Plains IDEA courses are housed within Gerontology; additional courses will be cross-listed by other ISU departments. Students will register for these courses using the “Geron” prefix. Students will enroll in thesis credits and will be supervised by a faculty member associated with the Gerontology Program. The Gerontology Program currently has student space and computer access for students in LeBaron Hall.

⁶ Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2008.

⁷ <http://www.gerontology.iastate.edu/faculty/>.

⁸ <http://www.gerontology.iastate.edu/faculty/pos-faculty/>.

- ◇ Cost. The University projects that the cost for the proposed program will be \$21,646 in Year One, increasing to \$25,105 by Year Seven. This includes funding for a program assistant and course release support.

Existing support. There are several sources of support already in place for the Gerontology program. These include program support provided by the College of Human Sciences; program space in LeBaron Hall provided by the College of Human Sciences; two-week summer salary support for the program director provided by the College of Human Sciences; support for three ¼ time graduate assistants provided by the Graduate College to recruit new students; and one course release for the director provided by the home department, Human Development and Family Studies. These resources will be shared across the existing programs as well as the proposed on-campus master's and doctoral programs.

To guarantee alternate year offerings of the proposed Gerontology courses, consent will be requested from the Graduate College, College of Human Sciences, and participating departments to support faculty teaching of these courses as "on load." GERON 630, Theories of Gerontology, can be taught online to broaden access to non-ISU students, including doctoral students at the Great Plains IDEA institutions. The Great Plains IDEA Gerontology faculty have expressed interest in such a doctoral-level course. It is anticipated that the three proposed courses can generate revenue to support participating colleges.

Requested fiscal support. Consistent with other inter-departmental programs which share administrative support resources, ¼ time administrative support has been requested from the Graduate College. A one-course release will be sought for the Director of Graduate Education (DOGE) of the proposed program. Currently, the Director of the Gerontology Program serves as DOGE for the on-campus graduate minor; the College of Human Sciences Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education serves as DOGE for the online MFCS students enrolled in the Gerontology track.

- ◇ Projected enrollment. For the past seven years, the average enrollment in the online master's and certificate programs has been 20 students. During that same period, the average enrollment in the on-campus Gerontology minor has been 18 students. To assist in projecting enrollment for the proposed program, the department observed graduate cohort recruitment and enrollment at other institutions. For example, at Tulane University, there was an annual program enrollment of 3-5 students which is typical of other Gerontology graduate programs. The projected enrollment for the proposed program is two students in Year One, increasing to 13-16 students by Year Seven.

The University anticipates recruiting students from several sources, including (1) ISU undergraduates minoring in Gerontology; (2) the University of Northern Iowa's undergraduate program; (3) online Great Plains IDEA certificate and master's students enrolled at ISU and its six partner institutions; (4) professionals working in the field who need specific training and credentials in Gerontology to advance; and (5) new recruits contacted through networking and academic and professional organizations, such as the Gerontological Society of America and Iowa CareGivers.

- ◇ Workforce Need/Demand. In general, “occupations in the master’s degree category are projected to grow the fastest, about 22%,” between 2010 and 2020.⁹ Serving and planning for aging-related needs is intrinsically related to occupations with the largest expected growth (e.g., 17-29% increase in community and social service, healthcare, personal care, computer information and technology, construction, business and finance.⁷

As outlined by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, there will be an increasing need to train professionals in health promotion programs, intergenerational activities, direct care to impaired older persons in care facility/adult day care/home care programs, counseling older persons and their families about caregiving, mental health, and end-of-life issues, and advising older clients about estate planning and investments, financial long-term care, or housing options. Other professionals need to work on behalf of older adults by conducting research on aging processes and diseases such as Alzheimer’s disease or osteoporosis, teaching courses on aging to college and university students, health care professionals and older adults, advocating with or on behalf of older persons before legislative bodies, designing products to meet the special interests and needs of older persons, and advising business, industry, and labor regarding older workers and consumers. ISU can take an increasing lead to train professionals in these critical areas.

- ◇ Accreditation for proposed program. Recommendations from the Association of Gerontology in Higher Education provided guidance in developing the proposed program; however, formal accreditation is not available.
- ◇ Date of implementation. The proposed program will become effective upon approval by the Board of Regents and will be included in the next General Catalog of the university. New students will be admitted for the entering class of Fall 2014.

⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics; <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/About/Projections-Overview.htm>.